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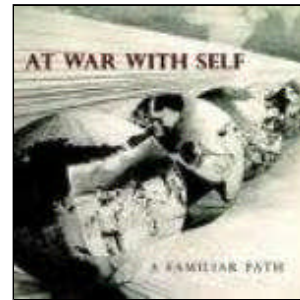



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At War With Self: A Familiar Path

At War With Self are a project put together by Gordian Knot guitarist Glenn Snelwar and *A Familiar Path* is their third album. The initial motivation behind At War With Self was to combine heavy music with progressive elements and then to add classical guitar to that concoction and whilst the second album *Acts Of God*,



used a slightly different blueprint, it's that first mission statement that Snelwar sticks by again with this release.

Aided this time round only by Manfred Dikkers on drums and percussion, Snelwar handles all guitars, bass and keyboards, as well as some mandolin and vocals, although Maggie Snelwar does add some vocals on "Ourselves". The album opens with two instrumentals "Reflections" and "Diseased State", which are pleasantly different from each other. The former kicks off as if you walked into a band in full flow, with a distorted guitar line and angular drum beat barely controlling a swooping, diving guitar solo that sets the tone of the song beautifully. In the background of all that is a subtle piece of classical guitar that slowly but surely bullies it's way into the lime light as the song goes on and by the finale of the track it's lilting uplifting melody dominates all in it's path. It's a stunning and beautiful introduction to the disc and with the swaying vibe created still fresh in your mouth the angular electric guitar blare that smacks you in the face for "Diseased State", becomes all the more breath taking. Coming across like Porcupine Tree jamming with Slayer it's an uncompromising statement, however there is still room for swaying chimes and frantic classical guitar clattering to contrast against the overall melee.

Fittingly the title track is also the longest song on the album and the first to feature vocals, the initial melody line is strongly reminiscent of "Another Green World" by Brian Eno and is one of the more traditional progressive rock moments on the disc. Beautiful layered vocals move over a stark acoustic back drop and give a feel that lies

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somewhere between Genesis and King Crimson, especially when the clanging guitars alter the mood later in the track. After the longest number on show we dive headlong into the shortest with the two and a half minutes of "The Ether Trail" with it's Geddy Lee galloping bass line and almost Steve Vai inspired fret blazing guitar work. Dikkers percussive work is tight, focused and in perfect sympathy with the music, always managing to keep pace with the mood shifts whether they be profound or delicate.

King Crimson jamming with an orchestra springs to mind with "Ourselves". Swathing strings compete with a huge barrage of bass and guitars and as each section of the song races by, the victor of the battle chops and changes. The beautiful reworking of "Etude No.10 (Villa-Lobos)", which is a guitar tutorial piece begins traditionally enough with Snelwar showing some wonderfully dexterous guitar work, however as the piece moves on the tradition makes way for a progressive jazz work out of the highest order. Dikkers is especially impressive as the track plays out as he batters seven shades of hell out of his kit.

Once more prog collides with thrash on "Concrete And Poison" and it's this ability to merge and interchange styles seamlessly that continues to astound and hold the attention. Closing track "Hope" is a surprisingly gentle way for the album to play out, however with the classical progressions now moved to electric guitar it is no less compelling or effective.

A Familiar Path proves that in the right hands it is still possible to fuse together disparate genres into hugely innovative and enjoyable music that not only challenges, but rewards the listener with every listen, the sound on the disc is flawless and I have no hesitation in recommending this album to anyone interested in progressive music.

Track Listing

1. Reflections
2. Diseased State
3. A Familiar Path
4. The Ether Trail
5. Ourselves
6. Etude No.10 (Villa-Lobos)
7. Concrete And Poison
8. Hope

Added: December 31st 2009

Reviewer: **Steven Reid**

Score: ★★★★★

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